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Citation for published version:

Grumett, D 2006, 'Give us this day our supersubstantial bread', *Studia Liturgica*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 201-11.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/003932070603600206>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1177/003932070603600206](https://doi.org/10.1177/003932070603600206)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Studia Liturgica

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SL 36 (2006) 00-00

Give Us This Day our Supersubstantial Bread

by

David J. Grumett

When Peter Abelard visited Heloise at the convent of the Paraclete, where she was Abbess, she informed him of an objection which Bernard of Clairvaux had raised with her privately concerning the version of the Lord's Prayer which the community recited. Abelard himself had given the convent to Heloise and her nuns, and it was he who had laid down the liturgical practices and other customary to be followed in its Benedictine rule. He wrote to Abbot Bernard in response, setting out the following defense of his choice:

What therefore is the cause, that we change only one word of Matthew's and retain the others, namely saying "daily" for "supersubstantial," let him explain who can, if indeed this is possible. The term "daily" does not seem to express the excellence of this bread in the way "supersubstantial" does. It does not seem to be a minimal presumption to change the words of the apostle, and thus to compose one prayer from the two evangelists, neither of which seems to be sufficient, and to prefer it, as if neither was said by the Lord, nor written by any of the evangelists. Indeed, in all the other portions of their writings recited in church, their words are unmixed, even if they disagree in perfection or imperfection. And so if someone accuses me of novelty about this, let him listen whether he more ought to be accused who presumes to compose from two prayers written of old, one new one, not to be called of the gospel, but his own.¹

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¹ Letter X of Peter Abelard to Bernard of Clairvaux, PL 178, 337c–d.

Abelard, in his gentle chiding of Bernard, alludes to the many liturgical reforms enacted by the Cistercian order and by Bernard himself, suggesting that many of those are less well-founded than the one under scrutiny.² Imbued with Jerome's Vulgate, Abelard distinguishes between the different Latin adjectives used to describe the bread in the two versions of the Lord's Prayer: *supersubstantialem*, or "supersubstantial," in Matt 6:11, and *cotidianum*, or "daily," in Luke 11:3. Abelard gives several reasons why Matthew's version of the prayer is likely to reflect more accurately the words of Jesus than Luke's. Matthew, but not Luke, was present when Jesus spoke the words of the actual prayer, and Matthew introduces the prayer as a direct command rather than simple teaching. Matthew's prayer text is also more complete, being composed of seven petitions rather than Luke's five, and was originally produced, Abelard asserts, in Hebrew. He summarizes his conclusion about the respective priority of the two sources in the following succinct terms: "Matthew is drinking from the spring, but Luke from the stream of the spring."

Abelard's mischievous questioning of Bernard is, like many defenses of minor liturgical adjustments, not entirely well-argued.³ In fact, *supersubstantialem* and *cotidianum* are two different renderings of the same Greek term ἐπιούσιον (epiousion). This fact appears to diminish Abelard's case considerably. Jerome, being an accomplished scholar of the Greek language, seems simply to have been offering two distinct renderings of an extremely rare and difficult term.⁴ His ambivalence reflects the two principal options available: ἐπ(i)-ούσιον

² Chrysogonus Waddell, "Peter Abelard's *Letter 10* and Cistercian Liturgical Reform," in *Studies in Medieval Cistercian History*, 2, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian, 1976) 75–86.

³ John Cassian had committed a similar error in *The First Conference of Abbot Isaac: On Prayer* 21 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, series 2, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1961) 11:394–95 [cited hereafter as *NPNF*].

⁴ David F. Wright, "What Kind of Bread? The Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer from the Fathers to the Reformers" in *Oratio: das Gebet in patristischer und reformatorischer Sicht*, eds.

(“supersubstantial”), or *epiousion* (“for tomorrow” or “daily”). The first possibility is the more obvious, although it requires elision of the iota to make proper grammatical sense. The second conveys a clearer practical meaning, but supposes an equally unusual derivation of *epiousion* from the verb *epienai* (“to come”), as with *h(e)piou=sa* [h9me/ra], meaning “the coming day.”

The Challoner translation of the Vulgate, influential prior to the Second Vatican Council following its reissue in 1914, employed “supersubstantial” in Matt 6:11,⁵ and the New Vulgate of 1979 continues to use *supersubstantialem* in the same verse. Most modern translations have, however, opted for “daily” in place of the more metaphysical term, as did the earlier and generally less accurate Latin translation which Jerome’s Vulgate replaced. This option was lent substantial support by evidence presented by A. H. Sayce, who claimed to have discovered the word *epiousioj* employed in a wholly mundane sense in a contemporaneous account book to refer to daily household provisions—literally the bread, and other items, required for the day.⁶ For much of the twentieth century, Sayce’s findings were cited in support of this practical interpretation of the prayer by its many proponents. Significantly, however, none had been able to locate the crucial manuscript or any equivalent evidence. Sayce’s theory has recently been shown to be unsound in a brief but important article by M. Nijman and Klaas Worp, who over a century later have finally located the manuscript and prove that Sayce misread the crucial word. He had transcribed *epiousi*, and completed it by adding the final two unidentifiable characters

Emidio Campi, Leif Grane and Adolf Martin Ritter (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1999) 153, 160.

⁵ *The Holy Bible, translated from the Vulgate* (London: Washbourne, 1914).

⁶ A. H. Sayce, “The Greek Papyri” in W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Hawara, Biahmu, and Arsinoe* (London: Field and Tuer, 1889) 33–34.

-wn. Nijman and Worp have established that a far more prosaic reference to olive oil (e0laioũ) is, in fact, clearly legible.⁷ Epiou&sion is after all, therefore, a hapax legomenon unique to the evangelists Matthew and Luke. Indeed, in Matthew's account, Jesus specifically counsels his disciples later in the same chapter *against* worrying about the daily provision of food (6:25, 31).⁸

I. The Bread of the Presence of the Lord

Now is an opportune time, this new evidence in view, to reassess what the request for bread, fundamental and ubiquitous in Christian worship, might mean. That the Matthaean version of the Lord's Prayer is extracted from a liturgical setting is suggested by its conclusion with the Jewish-style doxology, reminiscent of David's prayer of thanksgiving to God over the offerings for the building of the Temple (1 Chr 29:11). A eucharistic context is even more apparent in the *Didache*, rediscovered in 1875, which situates the prayer and the e0piou&sion bread following the discourse on baptism and inaugurating the discussion of the eucharist, and also includes an abbreviated doxology.⁹ Furthermore, in the course of catechetical instruction

⁷ M. Nijman and Klaas A. Worp, "EPIOUSIOS' in a Documentary Papyrus?," *Novum Testamentum* 41 (1999) 231–34. Bruce Metzger had already advised caution about attributing too much importance to Sayce's exceptional and unverifiable text in "How many times does e0piou&sioj occur outside the Lord's Prayer?," *Expository Times* 69 (1957) 52–54.

⁸ As noted by Maximus the Confessor, "Commentary on the Our Father" in *Selected Writings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1985) 113–14.

⁹ "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" [i.e. *Didache ton dodeka Apostolon*] 8:2 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993) 7:379; Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2002) 294–95. A concern to reclaim the prayer's liturgical context also underlies Georg Korting's provocative tome *Das Vaterunser und die Unheilabwehr: ein Beitrag zur e0piou&sion-Debatte (Mt 6,11/Lk 11,3)* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2004), in which he draws widely on classical literature (346–636) assimilated, he argues, into Jewish Christianity and transformed by it, to develop the proposal that e0piou&sion is a corruption of e0pi-r9u&sion, and therefore refers to Christ as the pledge or surety by which the world is

delivered by Cyril of Jerusalem, the prayer is not introduced until its concluding climax, delivered shortly before the candidates were admitted into full membership of the worshipping community and became eligible for the first time to receive the eucharist.¹⁰ Moreover, the bread petition appears to be the only one in the prayer with no identifiable origins in the *kaddish* or other benedictions of synagogue worship. This suggests that the adjective is used to refer to something new and important, and not just ordinary food.¹¹ Indeed, it is unusual simply on the grounds of being the only adjective in the prayer. On the basis of evidence such as this, Eugene LaVerdiere has gone so far as to argue that *e0piou&sioj* designated the eucharistic meal itself, as a word used solely within the community of believers and thus with no meaning outside the clear boundaries of that community.¹² The Lord's Prayer was, in this early context, itself a sign of full membership of the community of believers,¹³ and performed, in this respect, an identical function to that of the eucharist itself, to which it unsurprisingly referred. As the community grew in size, LaVerdiere argues persuasively, the original designation of the meal came to be replaced with more easily comprehensible terms still recognizable today, such as the

redeemed. The merits of this novel argument fall beyond the scope of my paper, although are congenial to its objective of identifying the prayer's eucharistic setting and reference.

¹⁰ Cyril of Jerusalem, "Catechetical Lectures" 23.15 in *NPNF*, 7:155.

¹¹ W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925) 151–54. For an equally valid cautionary word against reading too many direct influences into similarities between the Lord's Prayer and preceding forms, see Paul Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church: A Study of the Origin and Early Development of the Office* (London: SPCK, 1981) 27.

¹² Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996) 9.

¹³ Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*, *Studies in Biblical Theology* 2, vol. 6 (London: SCM, 1967) 85. The sense of great privilege and awesome reverence therefore connected with saying the prayer—as well as the different introductions given by Matthew and Luke—is captured in the priest's own prelude in the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*: "As our sauour Christe hath commaunded and taught us, we are bolde to saye"

Lord's Supper, yet was conservatively preserved in the prayer, which was a product of the very earliest eucharistic gatherings.

The wider Hebrew context of Matthew should not be overlooked, especially in the current discussion.¹⁴ The eucharistic setting of the request for *e0piou&sion* bread indeed positively encourages comparison with Jewish bread liturgy. In reflecting on the Old Testament antecedents to the New Testament eucharist, commentators have tended to focus on the manna episode of Exod 16.¹⁵ The manna is clearly evocative of individual communion hosts, being described in several modern translations as "like wafers" (16:31), and this association can be traced to a discussion of Tertullian's of the Lucan version of the Lord's Prayer.¹⁶ The manna is, moreover, alluded to in Hebrew scripture without any accompanying explicit reference (Num 21:5; Wis 16:20, 19:21), suggesting its recognized importance in theological symbolism.¹⁷ Modern interpreters such as Pierre Grelot have pursued this line of argument. Grelot states that Matthew provides the Lord's Prayer with a liturgical and eucharistic amplification, and regards the manna as typological of the eucharist.¹⁸ The liturgical amplification identified with this particular parallel is the accommodation of the words of the prayer to the setting of an evening eucharist: the manna was, for forty years, the bread of the early morning, whereas the eucharist,

¹⁴ On which, see W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) 1:17–58.

¹⁵ Including the magisterial Jean Carmignac, *Recherches sur le « Notre Père »* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1969) 214–21. Carmignac dismisses, however, the association with Temple liturgy, asserting that Jesus would not have linked the identifying prayer of his disciples with Jewish liturgy (139–40). There seem to be no good grounds for this assumption.

¹⁶ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.26 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 3:392–93.

¹⁷ Carmignac, 193.

¹⁸ Pierre Grelot, "La quatrième demande du Pater et son arrière-plan sémitique," *New Testament Studies* 25 (1979) 299–305; also LaVerdiere, 192.

when celebrated in the evening in anticipation of the coming day, becomes the bread of the morrow.¹⁹

God's sending of the manna to the Israelites in the wilderness is not, however, the most obvious liturgical association, because the manna is not received in a formal worship setting. There is the additional problem that, according to *Didache* 8:3, the Lord's Prayer was to be recited three times a day, and not at any single time of day (cf. Dan 6:10, Ps 55:17). The feeding with manna in the wilderness is set, moreover, at least thirteen centuries before the prayer was formulated, which suggests that its continued significance needs to be considered in the context of tangible forms of transmission and remembrance. More important than the feeding itself seems, therefore, to be the specific means by which the manna was subsequently preserved and remembered. In Exodus, before the Israelites reach the border of Canaan, Moses commands Aaron to "take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations" (16:33). The Israelites are thus reminded of how they were sustained by God in the wilderness. In the subsequent provisions for the building of the Temple, the Lord instructs Moses concerning the Holy Place: "You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always" (Exod 25:30—לֶחֶם פָּנִים [lechem panim]; cf. Exod 35:13, 39:36, Num 4:7, 1 Sam 21:6, 1 Kgs 7:48, 2 Chr 4:19—לֶחֶם הַפָּנִים [lechem hapanim]). The memory and presence of the manna are thus preserved and renewed in a concrete liturgical context. It is this specific setting, rather than abstract historical myth, which makes the manna significant for later Jewish followers of Christ. Indeed, Roy Gane argues that the bread is "of" the presence in the sense that it is in the presence of YHWH defined by the detailed prescriptions for the formation

¹⁹ See F. H. Chase, *The Lord's Prayer in the Early Church*, Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature, 1.3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891) 46–47.

of the liturgical space received by Moses on Sinai.²⁰ The physical and liturgical location of the manna is invoked in Heb 9:2, where the golden urn holding it is described as contained within the ark of the covenant kept within the tent called the Holy of Holies, which was the first earthly sanctuary. The manna was believed to have been sealed in a cave for safekeeping around the time of the Babylonian deportation to prevent it being plundered by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar at the destruction of the Temple, either by Jeremiah (2 Macc 2:4–8) or an angel (2 Bar 6:5–10, 29:8), “until the Lord gathers his people together again and shows his mercy” (2 Macc 2:7). “Hidden” manna is, moreover, presented in Rev 2:17 as a reward for conquering evil, on account of this significance which it possessed in the churches as a sign of the return of the Messiah.²¹

Jerome, in common with most patristic writers, believed that Matthew wrote his “Gospel for the Jews” originally in Hebrew, and even claimed to have had access to a more ancient Hebrew text of Matthew, which he apparently used to resolve various interpretive difficulties. He states: “The Hebrew itself has been preserved until the present day in the library at Caesarea which Pamphilus so diligently gathered. I have also had the opportunity of having the volume described to me by the Nazarenes of Beroea, a city of Syria, who use it.”²² Modern scholars have mostly regarded the possible existence of a Hebrew Matthew with skepticism, and some have suggested that Jerome and others mistook the *Gospel to the Hebrews* for an early Hebrew translation of Matthew’s own Gospel. William Horbury has argued that no early Hebrew text is likely to originate before the fourth century when these began to circulate more widely among

²⁰ Roy Gane, “‘Bread of the Presence’ and Creator-in-Residence,” *Vetus testamentum* 42 (1992) 180–92.

²¹ Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000) 105–106.

²² Jerome, “Famous Men” 3 in *NPNF*, 3:362. Occurrences are listed in translation in Dennis Brown, *Vir Trilinguis: A Study in the Biblical Exegesis of Saint Jerome* (Kampen: Pharos, 1992) 184–87.

Jews during the renaissance in their use of Hebrew.²³ Jerome's preference for *supersubstantialem* over *cotidianum* in Matt 6:11 could have been influenced by this manuscript, whatever it in fact was, even though Jerome does not himself make this connection.

The oldest Syriac version of the bread petition, the Curetonian, renders *e0piou&sion* as “continual,” whilst the Acts of Thomas describes the bread as “constant.”²⁴ Dikran Hadidan employs this and related Aramaic evidence as the basis for suggesting that “daily” should be understood as meaning “continual”: the *e0piou&sioj* bread is, in other words, the bread of continuity.²⁵ Lemuel Potwin makes a similar proposal in a much earlier discussion, comparing the eucharistic “bread of continuity” with the Temple bread, which he argues is best referred to as the “bread of continuance,” justifying this in terms of a Curetonian “habit of speech which calls the constant things of life ‘daily.’”²⁶ The same term is used to describe the “continual burnt offering” to be offered in the Temple “day by day” (Exod 29:38, 42). At several points in Daniel, moreover, when the bread is confiscated from the violated sanctuary, it is referred to simply as “the continuance” (Dan 8:11–13; 11:31; 12:11). The Jerusalem Bible indeed renders the לֶחֶם פָּנִים [lechem panim] of Exod 25:30 the “bread of continual offering.” This suggestive proposal elides the purported distinction typically made between the bread as *supersubstantialem* and *cotidianum*: the bread is supersubstantial precisely because it is the gift by which God makes his presence continually known in the midst of the people. The sense of continuity or

²³ William Horbury, “The Hebrew Text of Matthew in Shem Tob ibn Shaprut’s *Eben Bohan*” in *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 3:737–38.

²⁴ *Evangelion da-mepharreshê. The Curetonian Version of the Four Gospels*, ed. F. Crawford Burkitt, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904) 30–31; *The Acts of Thomas* 144, introduction, text, and commentary A. F. J. Klijn (Leiden: Brill, 1962) 142, 293.

²⁵ Dikran Y. Hadidan, “The Meaning of *e0piou&sioj* and the Codices Sergii,” *New Testament Studies* 5 (1958) 75–81. Hadidan cites Syrus Sinaiticus as supporting Syrus Curetonianus, but Matt 6:11 is a lacuna in that manuscript.

²⁶ Lemuel Potwin, “*e0piou&sioj*,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 12 (1893) 18–19.

repetition given by Luke's δι&dou—in contrast with Matthew's δο_ϋ—is therefore preserved in the ε0πιου&σιον adjective itself. This is perhaps suggested by Jerome's own treatment of the matter. He is content to translate ε0πιου&σιον “*supersubstantialem*” despite having claimed in his commentary on Matthew to have “found MAHAR in place of the bread which is necessary to support life, which means ‘for tomorrow,’ i.e., give us our bread for tomorrow, i.e., for the future, today.”²⁷

II. Substance and Presence

The notion that the ε0πιου&σιον bread is supersubstantial, preserved most explicitly in the *panem supersubstantialem* of the Vulgate Matthew, might be assumed to have provided the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation with impetus during its developmental phase, owing to its metaphysical overtones. The Tridentine decree on the eucharist, quoted by Leo XIII in his 1902 encyclical *Mirae caritatis* on the Holy Eucharist, indeed describes the bread as *supersubstantialis*: “truly the life of the soul and the unending health of the mind.”²⁸ Transubstantiation is, however, more often inspired by the direct synoptic Last Supper identification by Christ of the eucharistic bread with his body and of the cup with his blood. The significance of bread as supersubstantial lies, by contrast, in the possibilities this notion provides for a deeper metaphysical understanding of the identification that takes full account of its Jewish antecedents.

²⁷ PL 26, 44c; trans. in Brown, *Vir Trilinguis*, 185. A recent parallel edition is *Commentaire sur S. Matthieu*, 2 vols., Sources chrétiennes, 242, 269 (Paris: Cerf, 1977–1979).

²⁸ “Decree on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist” 8, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. N. P. Tanner, vol. 2 (London: Sheed and Ward, 1990) 697; *Mirae caritatis* 15 in *The Papal Encyclicals*, 5 vols. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Pierian, 1990) 2:506. Tanner curiously renders the crucial term in Trent “life-supporting,” despite the citation of Matt 6:11 and *supersubstantialem* in the Latin.

Augustine asserts that the Eastern tradition had resisted the sense of *εὐπρεπής* as “daily,” at least in a mundane sense, because that tradition possessed no tradition of daily communion.²⁹ When Eastern theologians interpreted *εὐπρεπής* as “supersubstantial” they were not, however, motivated by purely negative concerns. Designation of the eucharist as supersubstantial (*εὐπρεπής*) in fact mirrors the identification of the Godhead as supersubstantial (*ὑπερθεός*). This is even more apparent in Latin discussions, where the same term *supersubstantialis* is frequently applied to both. In fact, the interpretation provides a basis for identifying the eucharist with divine substance in ways which neither understate the metaphysical difference between the eucharist and ordinary material products, nor present the eucharist as so utterly distinct from the created order as to be incomprehensible in human terms. Particularly important here is the apophatic speculation of Pseudo-Dionysius, whose Platonism becomes fused with Aristotelian metaphysics in Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae*. Aquinas cites Dionysius’s *Divine Names* in the course of his consideration of whether or not God can be referred to as a person. Dionysius, he states, describes the Deity as hidden (*occulta*) and supersubstantial (*supersubstantialis*) in the sense of surpassing all substances as transcendent.³⁰ The notion of God as supersubstantial provides, in other words, an essential corrective to immanentist notions of deity which tend to diminish the degree of God’s difference from the created order. Dionysius later uses the vocabulary of *ὑπερθεός* in referring to many things about the Godhead: subsistence, the Triune Name, the internal relations of the hypostases,

²⁹ Augustine, “Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount” 8.26 in *NPNF*, 1:6, 42.

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 29, a. 3; cf. Dionysius, *On the Divine Names* 1.2, PG 3, 588c; trans. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names in Complete Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1987) 50.

their distinction, their unity and their union.³¹ In all cases, the Latin rendition involves *supersubstantialis*.

Henri Bourgoïn suggests that *superessentialis* would have provided a more satisfactory translation of ἐπιουσιος for Jerome to have chosen than the dual-prefixed and rather awkward *super-sub-stantialis*.³² Whilst this is undoubtedly true, the less elegant possibility preserves the strong sense that the eucharist exemplifies and anticipates the *completion* of matter (substance) rather than its annihilation. The language of superessentiality is, in contrast, typically encountered in the apophatic Platonic mysticism of Dionysius and others to describe the complete absence of any material corruption in the deity. Other theologians preserve a less apophatic view of the Godhead. Aquinas himself states that all material things exist supersubstantially in God, thus suggesting that God provides the possibility of the completion or perfection of substance.³³ In the *De trinitate* of Boethius, God is described as a substance which is supersubstantial (*substantia sed ultra substantiam*).³⁴ In John of Damascus's treatise *On the Orthodox Faith*, God is likewise supersubstantial substance (ὑπερουσιος οὐσιον).³⁵ Origen neatly expresses how the crucial question is not ultimately about whether God is substantial or beyond substance, but concerns the language used to describe the distinction between divine substance, whether of the Godhead itself or of the eucharist, and created substance. He states:

Those who assert that the hypostasis of incorporeal things is primary think of what is properly substance in terms of incorporeal things whose essence is fixed and can neither

³¹ Dionysius, PG 3, 630-645.

³² Henri Bourgoïn, "Επιουσιος expliqué par la notion de préfixe vide," *Biblica* 60 (1979) 94.

³³ Aquinas, Ia, q. 57, a. 1, resp., citing Dionysius, *On the Divine Names* 1.5, PG 3, 592.

³⁴ Boethius, *On the Trinity*, 4.4, *The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, Latin Loeb Classical Library 74 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973) 16–19.

³⁵ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*, 1.8,12, PG 94, 848b.

admit of addition not suffer subtraction. . . . But others [who] think that the hypostasis of incorporeal things is secondary, whilst that of bodies is primary.³⁶

This mutual reciprocity of substance and transcendence in descriptions of the Godhead and the created order is expressed in Orthodox liturgy. In the litany preceding the blessing of water—both at baptism and for the great Epiphany blessing—the deacon prays that “upon these waters there may descend the cleansing operation of the supersubstantial Trinity.” The collect for Christmas Day proclaims, with reference to Christ, “Today the Virgin brings forth the Supersubstantial One / And the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One.” In these instances, it is precisely the supersubstantiality of the Word which enables it to become present in the substantial world without surrendering its divinity. The world is, at the same time, recognized as being in need of God’s substantial action to remedy its ontological deficiency, and as being transcendently disposed to receive this action.

The discussion may now return to the specific instance of eucharistic (super)substance, and to the way in which the ambivalence of its status provides the basis for an understanding of its transforming power. Ambrose states: “Bread is *e0piou&sioj*, because, taking the substance of abiding power from the substance of the Word, it supplies this to heart and soul, for it is written: ‘And bread strengthens man’s heart.’”³⁷ He thus designates the bread as supersubstantial because of the relation which it establishes between the “substance of the Word” and the apparently unsubstantial being of humanity. This is in the wider context of his anti-Arian defense of the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. As in christology, so with the eucharist: both involve the transplanting of a real divine element into the natural world. Symeon the New Theologian remarks similarly, but evoking a communal ecclesial context, that the

³⁶ Eric George Jay, *Origen’s Treatise on Prayer* 27.8 (London: SPCK, 1954) 172–73.

³⁷ Ambrose, *On the Christian Faith* 3.15 in *NPNF*, 10:259–60.

Church is able to love the true and incorruptible life only if nourished continually or every day (kaq' e(ka/sthn [h(me&ran]) by the supersubstantial bread (to_n e)piou/sion a!rton).³⁸ He thus describes renewal from a human perspective, although not in Ambrose's pragmatic terms of giving substance to human life, but as the granting to humanity of something *supersubstantial* which enables it to share in divine life.

Elements of both Ambrose's and Symeon's perspectives are identifiable in Teilhard de Chardin's epiclesis in "The Mass on the World," in which he prays:

Blazing Spirit, Fire, personal, supersubstantial, the consummation of a union so immeasurably more lovely and more desirable than that destructive fusion of which all the pantheists dream: be pleased yet once again to come down and breathe a soul into the newly formed, fragile film of matter with which the world is this day to be freshly clothed.³⁹

Teilhard subsequently links the action of the Word directly to metaphysics, affirming that

at the touch of the supersubstantial Word the immense host which is the universe is made flesh. Through your own incarnation, my God, all matter is henceforth incarnate.⁴⁰

Teilhard accepts, like Ambrose, the dependence of material life on divine substance to supply its own inferior substantiality, yet retains, with Symeon, the sense that this transfer is not simply the strengthening of human life, but the imparting of divine life to creation. His vision of the world existing in Christ and being transformed by Christ is similarly expressed in the words of Thomas Traherne:

O what a World art Thou! a World within!
All Things appear,
All Objects are
Alive in Thee! Supersubstantial, Rare,

³⁸ Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical Discourse* 1.6, 169–171 in *Traité théologiques et éthiques*, Sources chrétiennes 122 (Paris: Cerf, 1967) 236–37.

³⁹ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Mass on the World" in idem, *The Heart of Matter* (San Diego: Harvest, 1974) 122.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 123.

Abov them selvs, and nigh of Kin
 To those pure Things we find
 In his Great Mind
 Who made the World! tho now Ecclypsd by Sin.
 There they are Usefull and Divine,
 Exalted there they ought to Shine.⁴¹

It is especially pertinent to reflect on the bread of the Presence as a prototype for the eucharist in light of the 2003 call by John Paul II for a renewal of eucharistic adoration.⁴² This can only ultimately be adoration of the person of Christ present in the eucharist—a conception of the eucharist supported by the words of Matt 6:11 and Luke 11:3 which the Jewish followers of Christ prayed in their liturgy in which Christ became present to them. The bread of the eucharist is supersubstantial, and for this reason “daily,” because it has been offered continually and is still so offered today.

⁴¹ Thomas Traherne, “My Spirit” in *The Poetical Works*, 3d ed. (London: Dobell, 1932) 32.

⁴² *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* §§ 10, 25, echoing Paul VI, *Mysterium fidei* (1965) § 66 in *The Papal Encyclicals*, 5:177. See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, rev. ed. (London: Burns and Oates, 2002) 1373–81, 2837; pp. 309–312, 603.